

**PROTECT
PUBLIC HEALTH**

**REVIVE
THE ECONOMY**

**STRENGTHEN
OUR COMMUNITY**

CAPITOL CONNECTION

NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER 2022

From the governor: Mahalo to the people of Hawai'i

It's been an extraordinary time for Hawai'i and the rest of the world as we emerge from the pandemic and take stock of how our lives have changed. Despite COVID-19 — and because of it — we've learned lessons that will carry us into the future. At the heart of it has been Governor Ige and his team, who have worked with the community to help keep us safe and make progress on some of the state's most pressing needs. This last issue of Capitol Connection reflects on how far we've come in eight years and the foundation laid for the future.

Q. When you decided to run for governor, what did you feel needed changing and where have we made the most progress?

A. After being in the legislature for so long, I thought there were a lot of things we could do better — in housing, sustainability, education, renewable energy, and modernizing state government. We've made significant progress in all these areas. The pandemic also showed us where the gaps were — especially in health care. COVID-19 helped move us to a more sustainable model for tourism to balance community needs and resources with diversified economic growth.

Kaka'ako is a prime example of how we had to change the way we build affordable housing. Kaka'ako used to be 90% luxury housing, not built for local residents. We refocused the issue and improved the system to develop more affordable housing, such as Hale Kewalo, Keauhou Lane and Artspace Lofts, in that area. By the time I leave office, we'll have finished 15,000 units statewide — 9,400 of them affordable — with more in the pipeline. During our administration, **Hawai'i became a world leader in clean energy transformation and sustainability.** We actually doubled production of electricity from renewable sources, with nine more future projects that can start to reduce the cost of energy for the community.



Governor David Ige and First Lady Dawn Amano-Ige.

Q. What would you say to young people about a future in public service?

A. I'm thankful for anyone who chooses government service. I understand businesses are having trouble finding enough staff, but what better mission could there be than to serve the public and improve the quality of life in Hawai'i? I really believe that the thousands of government workers don't get enough credit for the jobs they do. That's why I wanted to use technology to modernize state systems and give departments the tools and resources they need to serve the public better.

Q. What do you want to say to the people of Hawai'i as you leave office?

A. We've been through so much together: COVID-19, Red Hill, hurricanes, floods and more. What I value most are the people and the beauty of Hawai'i. I still marvel at our aloha spirit during the height of the pandemic when virtually everyone understood the importance of putting the community first. I'm so grateful people realized we all had to make sacrifices, and that made a huge difference. **It's been an honor and a privilege to have served as governor during this critical time in our state's history.**

Q. What can you tell us about the rest of your time in office and future plans?

A. We're racing to the end of our term, working every day until Dec. 5. We want to get the tax rebate out to residents and implement pay adjustments for teachers to reduce compression. The First Lady and I will be taking a vacation, then we will be looking at opportunities to continue our work in education, sustainability, climate change and technology.

Protecting access to reproductive health care services

Governor Ige has added more state protections through executive order for anyone seeking an abortion or for health care providers who provide abortion services. “Abortion is legal in Hawai‘i,” said the governor at an Oct. 11 news conference. “Reproductive rights are protected by state law and the state constitution. We will not cooperate with any other state that tries to prosecute women who receive abortions. And we will not cooperate with any other state that tries to sanction medical professionals who provide abortions in Hawai‘i.”

The governor continued, “Effective immediately, departments and agencies under my authority shall not provide any information, including medical records, data, or billing, to another state seeking to impose penalties upon a person or entity related to reproductive health services in Hawai‘i.” Gov. Ige joins the governors of Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, who have adopted similar measures. Hawai‘i was the first state in the nation to decriminalize abortion over 52 years ago.



Gov. Ige with Dr. Reni Soon (left) and state Rep. Linda Ichiyama.

Governor releases \$1.75M to ease nursing shortage



Gov. Ige and UH president David Lassner with legislators, nursing school officials and students.

Thanks to \$1.75 million recently released by the governor, the University of Hawai‘i will be able to double the intake of nursing students into its programs, according to UH officials. “Nursing and health care access are critical to public safety,” said Governor Ige at a press conference last month. “No point was made stronger than during the last two and a half years of the COVID pandemic. Nurses were at the forefront — from vaccine awareness to direct patient care.”

The UH system will now be able to accept more students because of the added funds to hire 39 more clinical nursing instructors at UH Mānoa, UH Hilo and several community colleges. “This is a huge boost to our capacity and ability to serve the state,” said UH President David Lassner. Hawai‘i currently has 1,000 vacancies for nurses, according to the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations.

Holding the Navy accountable on Red Hill defueling

The Hawai‘i Department of Health continues to oversee the safe defueling and decommissioning of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility. On Oct. 7, the Department conditionally approved the first phase of the Navy’s plan to defuel Red Hill. The work to remove approximately one million gallons of fuel currently in the facility’s three pipelines commenced in October. Removing existing fuel from the Red Hill pipelines will allow the Navy to begin critical repairs to facilitate safe defueling. The Navy must seek DOH approval on a repair plan and defueling plan before those phases can move forward.

As the one-year anniversary of the contamination of the Navy’s drinking water system approaches, the Ige administration continues to work diligently to protect public health and the environment. The community came together to stand up for Hawai‘i residents and our precious natural resources. But there is more work to be done as DOH continues to push for the defueling and closure of the Red Hill facility to happen as quickly as possible with safety as the first priority.

Standing strong in the face of natural disasters

The bottom line: Over the past eight years, the Ige administration has responded to 40 emergencies and natural disasters — more than any other governor’s term in Hawai‘i history — from floods and hurricanes to earthquakes and the Kilauea eruption. With each incident, Hawaii learned valuable lessons as communities and agencies helped residents recover. The state continues to plan for the future, including the threats from climate change, utility and system disruption.

The Hawai‘i Army and Air National Guard, the Hawai‘i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) and teams from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have joined with other state, county and other federal agencies and private and community sectors to provide support to thousands of residents. HI-EMA has undergone a sweeping reorganization to improve its responsiveness, efficiency and transparency. HI-EMA plays a key role in delivering federal funding for hazard mitigation and recovery grants, including nearly \$300 million authorized for active emergencies since 2016



Gov. Ige confers with Hanalei residents and checks on earthquake damage in Puna.

Hawai'i ranked best in nation for COVID-19 response

"Our top priority has been the health and safety of Hawai'i's people." – Governor David Ige

The bottom line: A unified state response, led by the governor and his team, and supported by community leaders and our people, has resulted in a stronger Hawai'i, better prepared to navigate a post-pandemic world.

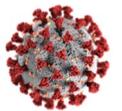
In the blur of the past nearly three years, it's easy to forget how far we've come – from knowing nothing about a strange, new coronavirus to transforming our lives to survive. The Commonwealth Fund ranked Hawai'i **best in the nation on overall performance** across 56 measures during the pandemic in 2020. As of July 2022, our state had the second lowest number of COVID-19 cases per capita and the second lowest death rate in the nation. **And at no time was Hawai'i's healthcare system so overwhelmed that it had to turn people away —unlike every other mainland state.**

Our success in battling the pandemic was a combination of steadfast local leadership and community collaboration — all of us pulling together to protect and help each other. "The governor always approached issues from the standpoint of what's good for our people and the state — not only in the here and now, but for future generations," said Department of Health (DOH) director Dr. Libby Char. DOH collaborated with all sectors of government and the community in campaigns for mask wearing, vaccines, boosters and guidance for schools, businesses healthcare facilities, the visitor industry and more as the state sought ways to help people survive.

To address the pandemic's economic impacts while still protecting people's health and safety, the governor and his team implemented the **Safe Travels program** in collaboration with the Hawai'i Tourism Authority, airlines, hotels and many others, successfully screening millions of travelers before entry to the state. **The community will never fully know everything our leaders did to keep Hawai'i safe, but it took all of us working together to make it happen.**



The Hawai'i Way: Partners in pandemic survival



The bottom line: An 'Ohana Nui approach and an unprecedented collaboration during the Ige administration between the departments of Health and Human Services has resulted in major benefits for community members who most need state services. Despite the pandemic, in 2022 Hawai'i was named one of the healthiest states in the nation.

Here's just a sampling of how the Ige administration, working with county mayors, state departments, the legislature, healthcare workers, community stakeholders and federal partners, provided the support people needed at the height of the pandemic:

- **Increased healthcare, food and nutrition benefits** – Medicaid enrollees increased by 36% and some 32,000 families were added to SNAP and \$6.6 billion in benefits were distributed. Nearly \$80 million went to support childcare providers when parents went back to work, and more than 97,000 eligible students received \$61 million in food assistance. The state Department of Human Services, which approved thousands of requests, averaged a two-day processing time to respond to the emergency. Through **Da Bux program**, the state matched a half million dollar donation from a hui of private sector partners to double the value of SNAP benefits.
- **Distributed unemployment benefits to hundreds of thousands of people** – The Department of Labor and Industrial Relations overcame an antiquated mainframe system to provide \$6.5 billion in unemployment insurance benefits and assistance.
- **Helped launch the popular Hawai'i Restaurant Card** – The pre-loaded \$500 debit cards, funded with \$75 million in relief funds, were mailed statewide to those who received unemployment benefits and provided a "win-win-win" for restaurants, local farmers and suppliers, and residents.
- **Found ways to support the business community** – The state used federal funds to repay the state's Unemployment Trust fund, saving millions of dollars for small businesses. It also provided more than 44,500 businesses and organizations in Hawai'i with \$3.8 billion through the Paycheck Protection Program. The \$25 million Hawai'i Business Pivot Grants reimbursed costs for small businesses and organizations that had to pivot their operations.
- **Provided rental relief and housing assistance to keep Hawai'i's people housed** – Distributed more than \$416 million in rental relief and housing assistance when people needed it most. In a January 2021 article, "**Rent Relief Needed Fast. Hawai'i Shows How,**" Forbes magazine reported on how the state overcame bureaucratic hurdles to get help to people and described it as a model for other states.



Businesses and others found ways to pivot.

Surpassing the goal to build more affordable housing

“Governor Ige’s leadership opened the lines of communication between affordable housing developers and various state agencies.” — EAH Housing president Kevin Carney

The bottom line: With streamlined policies, increased funding and improved financing tools, the Ige administration and housing partners have built more than 15,000 housing units over the past eight years — some 9,400 of which are affordable — with more units in the pipeline. The state also is making a historic \$600 million investment for Hawaiian Home Lands beneficiaries and has reduced family homelessness by 53%.

When Governor Ige took office, the state had no coordinated plan for encouraging the development of new housing units. Statewide production had stagnated due to burdensome government processes and lack of adequate legislative appropriations for housing projects. The governor quickly made affordable housing one of his top priorities and exceeded the minimum production target of 10,000 new units he set by 2020. He took the advice of public and private sector stakeholders and secured large capital infusions into the state’s affordable housing funds from the legislature to spur future projects.



At Hale Kalele: Gov. and Mrs. Ige, Chief Justice Recktenwald and Kobayashi Group.

A new bar set for providing more affordable housing for Hawai‘i

Governor Ige recently signed legislation to deposit \$300 million into the Rental Housing Revolving Fund (RHRF). This brings the total to \$783 million in RHRF legislative appropriations from 2015 to 2022, and \$147 million in Dwelling Unit Revolving Fund appropriations for the same period. Hawai‘i Housing Finance and Development Corporation (HHFDC) director Denise Iseri-Matsubara said what is special about the new law is that it targets “the missing middle” — those whose income falls in the 60 to 100% AMI of about \$78,000 to \$130,000 a year. “These are the food service workers, teachers, and nurses in our community,” she said.



Fulfilling Prince Jonah Kūhiō’s vision at DHHL.

Historic funding to reduce Hawaiian Homes wait list - The governor also signed into law what has been called “the most consequential allocation of funding for the Hawaiian Homes Commission in 100 years.” The historic \$600 million in funding continues the Ige administration’s push to reduce the waitlist for beneficiaries. The governor also signed into law a bill that provides \$328 million as part of the Kalima case settlement.

Breaking the cycle of homelessness — Even with the pandemic, the state and counties have been able to significantly reduce homelessness — especially among families with minor children. Between 2016 and 2022, statewide Point in Time count data shows a decrease of 53% from

805 families (2016) to 376 families (2022) for all families experiencing homelessness. Service providers and homeless coordinators have deployed a range of “housing first” solutions, including a successful ‘Ohana Zones initiative for 20 projects statewide.

Delivering on a clean energy future for the state

The bottom line: The Ige administration has doubled the state’s renewable energy for electricity and set Hawai‘i on a path that reduces our dependency on fossil fuel.

Electricity is something we all take for granted until the power goes out. But for Governor Ige and his team, the vision has been much bigger. The path to a clean energy future depends on making smart choices. The Ige administration has:

- **Set the direction for the state** - In 2015, the governor said no to LNG (liquefied natural gas) as a “bridge fuel” and no to the out-of-state company Next Era because he wanted to ensure local decision-making committed to renewable energy.
- **Made a commitment to clean energy** - The 2015 state legislature passed a law committing Hawai‘i to 100% clean energy electrical generation by 2045 — the first in the nation.
- **Led by example for the nation and the world** - The 2016 World Conservation Congress and Hōkūle‘a’s 2017 global voyage established Hawai‘i as a leader on the international stage. In 2017, Hawai‘i became the first state to commit to the Paris Climate Accord goals.
- **Delivered on promises for the future** - Hawai‘i has implemented energy-saving measures at state airports, highways and harbors as well as at schools and the UH system; begun converting state fleets to electric cars; and increased the number of EV charging stations to make it easier for people to drive electric vehicles. On O‘ahu, the state also closed the last coal plant, stopping 1.5 million metric tons of greenhouse gases that were emitted annually.



Clearway: Utility-scale solar and battery project.

Sustainable Hawai'i: Being pono for the next generation

The bottom line: The Ige administration is leaving a legacy of environmental protection in its Sustainable Hawai'i Initiative to provide a safer, cleaner future for us all. Hawai'i has become a recognized leader in the fight against climate change by our efforts to take care of our island home. The plan includes •Protecting 30% of our highest priority watersheds by 2030; • Effectively managing 30% of our nearshore ocean waters by 2030; • Implementing the first Hawai'i Biosecurity Plan by 2027; • Achieving 100% renewable electricity by 2045; • Doubling local food production.



The Miloli'i community celebrates new rules to protect its ocean resources.

"I'm very proud that, with the governor's leadership and support, we've been able to make significant progress," said Suzanne Case, Department of Land and Natural Resources director. "There's a public sense that things need to change. The fact that Hawai'i is a leader in addressing climate change is a good microcosm for the world. We have to do it ourselves. We can't wait for anyone else. If everyone does their part, we'll have a chance." During the Ige administration, the rate of watershed protection doubled, more effective instream flow standards were enacted, nearshore ocean management improved, and lands for conservation and recreation increased. The state also produced the first Interagency Biosecurity Plan and committed to more nature-based solutions as well as increasing agricultural lands for local food production.

Also, DLNR is part of the larger community-based effort to manage tourism through HTA's Destination Management Action Plans. That includes state parks at the Diamond Head State Monument, Hā'ena State Park on Kaua'i and Wai'ānapanapa State Park on Maui requiring advance reservations for out-of-state visitors. Hawai'i residents will continue to enjoy free access without reservations. DLNR also worked with Miloli'i residents on Hawai'i island to develop rules to protect resources. "Community-based rules, in cooperation with government, are the way we can combine our past, present and future in a collaborative way. It's a very powerful tool," said Case.

Reshaping tourism and creating an innovation economy



HTA/ Heather Goodman

Residents and visitors need to protect the 'āina .

The bottom line: In the wake of the pandemic, the Ige administration has moved to 1) re-shape the visitor industry with a focus on "regenerative tourism" and 2) nurture emerging industries for promising careers, expand broadband networks, and create a more diversified economy driven by innovation and powered by technology.

During the governor's first term, the administration advocated for expanding the U.S. customs pre-clearance and leveraged the state's exceptional bond ratings to build new airport facilities at Honolulu, Maui and Kona airports.



Gov. Ige at TRUE Esports + Tech Lab event.

However, the pandemic during the governor's second term made it obvious the state had to act faster to develop a more sustainable approach that protects both natural resources and Native Hawaiian traditions and culture. "It took COVID-19 to teach us to embrace change or perish. Our children can have a future here if we can make change happen," said the governor. Now the push is for more economic diversification, digital equity, expanding broadband networks for people of all ages, and supporting emerging creative and tech industries through facilities such as the Entrepreneur's Sandbox and the Academy for Creative Media at UH West O'ahu as well as start-ups, small businesses and more programs to prepare students for the future.

IGE ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT LEADERS



Committed to a vision of education change and reform

The bottom line: Since 2015, the governor and his team have focused on education reform for empowerment in our public schools — from developing the Hawai'i Blueprint for Public Schools to Early College and Hawai'i Promise to recent pre-K facility funding and grants to support innovative, real-world learning and school partnerships. The vision of what Hawai'i's public schools and the University of Hawai'i system could be has been at the heart of the governor's drive to improve education.

Transforming entire statewide education systems in a pandemic was no small feat, but Hawaii's public schools and the 10-campus University of Hawai'i system managed to do it. The DOE transitioned to distance instruction, then implemented plans for each school complex to decide when students could move to in-person learning. Meanwhile, more than 45,000 UH system college students across the state successfully completed their education with record high graduation rates.



Kalani High's Mike Ida is Hawai'i Teacher of the Year.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

- A team formed by the governor developed Hawai'i's Blueprint for Public Schools in 2016 to encourage empowerment and innovation in Hawai'i's public schools. Over 3,000 people across the state provided input as the Blueprint was developed. The document guided the Department of Education's strategic plan and moved away from a top-down, one-size-fits-all model.
- The Ige administration worked with the legislature on a \$100 million appropriation so the DOE could cool 1,300 classrooms at 88 schools on five islands to create the conditions for success and make it easier for students to learn.
- The governor was a strong advocate for programs like Early College and Hawai'i Promise, as a pathway to higher-paying jobs and better careers, to make it easier for students to afford higher education.
- The governor also focused attention on universal pre-K to give all Hawai'i keiki a head start on success. The state now has a new School Facilities Authority (SFA) to expand public pre-K by 2024 with a historic investment of \$200 million.
- To build on the Blueprint, the Governor's Emergency Education Relief innovation grants were awarded to 31 schools, UH system campuses and organizations working as partners to develop programs that challenged students and teachers to look at issues in new ways.

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

- With 10 campuses statewide, the University of Hawai'i system contributes to every aspect of life in Hawai'i — from training residents for high-demand careers to research in world-leading science. UH is also recognized as a global leader in sustainability.
- With the governor's support, UH launched Hawai'i's Promise to decrease financial barriers to education.
- In 2021, 34 UH Native Hawaiian education programs across the 10-campus system were awarded more than \$17.7 million in federal funding to train residents for high-demand jobs for the future.
- A \$16.4 million grant in 2022 will provide training at the UH community colleges for some 3,000 Hawai'i workers in clean energy, creative industries, health care and technology sectors.

Hale Ho'ola: New patient facility offers healing and hope



Gov. Ige, legislators, state hospital staff and DOH officials gather at new facility.

In his 2016 State of the State address, Governor Ige spoke of extending compassion to those who struggle every day with mental illness, especially those who are homeless. "Mental health is the single most pressing, unmet health issue facing our state," he maintained. That's why the Ige administration made a new forensic facility at the Hawai'i State Hospital a top priority.

Today that 144-bed, \$160 million facility — officially named Hale Ho'ola (a place of healing, safety) — is a reality and has more than 120 patients. Most of them have been ordered there by the courts after committing minor or serious offenses. "This facility marks a new era in providing quality care in a secure environment to those who need it most," said the governor. "It creates a therapeutic, healing environment and provides a secure forensic psychiatric facility to keep patients and staff safe."

State Hospital administrator Dr. Run Heidelberg added, "Now with our new hospital facility, we have a real game-changer. We're out of the business of warehousing people. We'll be able to address the needs of some of our most troubled residents."

Dr. Amy Curtis, Department of Health adult mental health division administrator, said she's encouraged by changes in the community's approach to mental illness. "For the first time, we're seeing everything aligned in the executive, legislative, judicial and public health areas," she said. Dr. Heidelberg was also excited about a partnership with neighboring Windward Community College to provide the state's first mental health technician certificate program, being offered free of charge for Fall 2022. The program prepares students to work as assistants to mental health professionals in institutions and community-based settings. Interested students can learn more at <https://windward.hawaii.edu/programs-of-study/mental-health-technician/>.



First mental health tech grads Jacqueline Turner and Cristine Lucas.

Navigating a world forever changed by COVID-19



“The governor made tough decisions based on what was good for the community — not just now but for future generations.”

— Dr. Libby Char, director, State Department of Health

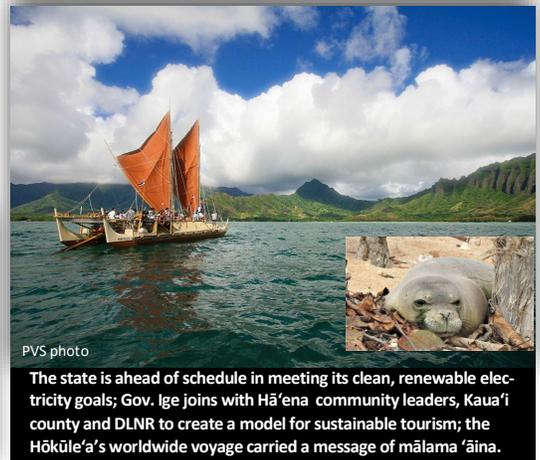


Governor Ige at one of many news conferences during the pandemic; Hawai‘i’s families masked up and got vaccinated and boosted; Queen’s Medical Center staff on the front lines; Red Hill work continues.

Leaving a legacy of protection for our island home

“The fact that Hawai‘i is a leader in addressing climate change is a good microcosm for the world. If everyone does their part, we’ll have a chance.”

— Suzanne Case, director, Department of Land and Natural Resources



PVS photo

The state is ahead of schedule in meeting its clean, renewable electricity goals; Gov. Ige joins with Hā‘ena community leaders, Kaua‘i county and DLNR to create a model for sustainable tourism; the Hōkūle‘a’s worldwide voyage carried a message of mālama ‘āina.

Making affordable housing a reality



“Think about all the housing built statewide in the past eight years. That’s leadership.”

— Christine Camp, president and CEO, Avalon Group



(from left) Groundbreaking for Hale Kewalo in Kaka‘ako; new renter Chelsie Onaga in her own first kitchen; affordable rentals on Maui and Kaua‘i; Don Collier at Hale Kālele.



For details, go to <https://governor.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/FINAL-2JUNE-Capitol-Connection-2022.pdf>

Modernizing state systems for better public service

The bottom line: Investments by the Ige administration in the state's information systems and transportation infrastructure have resulted in better security for legacy systems and highway, airport and harbor upgrades. These areas drive the state's economy, create jobs, and improve the daily experience of residents and visitors as well as day-to-day state operations.



Honolulu airport modernization.

The state Department of Transportation is helping to reduce Hawai'i's carbon footprint by installing energy efficient systems, photovoltaic panels and high-efficiency LED equipment. The annual energy use by HDOT highways improved by 43%. At 11 airports, energy use was cut in half. The highways division reopened Kūhiō Highway on Kaua'i following historic rains in 2018 and 2020, and reopened the Pali Highway following landslides. The division also ensured access during the 2018 Kīlauea eruption. The airports division continues to modernize and expand the state's facilities for future growth. The administration also moved forward with a comprehensive Harbor Modernization Program since some 90% of all goods consumed in the state pass through Hawai'i's commercial harbors.



The state has better cybersecurity for its systems.

After decades of relying on antiquated, paper-based systems, the Ige administration has modernized many government operations across multiple state departments to better serve the public. This includes the departments of Taxation and Accounting and General Services who worked with Enterprise Technology Services to improve legacy systems. Hawai'i's information technology upgrades earned it an A- grade and a "Future Ready Award" for its Safe Travels Digital Platform.

Leaving Hawai'i with a solid financial foundation

The bottom line: The State of Hawai'i has emerged in the strongest financial position it has ever held by fixing broken systems and delivering fiscal discipline that will save the future taxpayers of the state — our children — millions of dollars in contributions. When he took office, Governor Ige committed to building a strong financial foundation for the state. "During his two terms, the state has paid down its debts, earned improved bond ratings, invested prudently and modernized the tax system to ensure financial stability, enable future growth and provide funds for crucial state services," said state Budget and Finance director Craig Hirai.

Despite the aftermath of a crippling pandemic — and in part, because of the federal funding received — the state ended fiscal year 2022 with a historically high general fund balance of \$2.6 billion. **Administrative actions have helped earn the highest G.O. bond ratings and the lowest interest costs in the state's history. That has resulted in more funds for high-priority capital improvement projects as well as tax rebates for residents.**

Behind the lines: An editor's note of thanks, gratitude



Governor Ige and editor Libby Young

Every month for the past seven years, I've been able to talk story with Governor Ige for the Capitol Connection newsletter. We sit at a round table in his office — sometimes while he's munching on his lunch because that's the only time he has to eat. We usually talk for an hour, I never give him questions in advance, and he never micromanages which issues to cover or how to tell the story. But he does care that what we publish is fair and balanced and accurate.

As a journalist and former journalism teacher, what I've valued most is that I felt I could ask the governor anything, and he would answer as honestly as he could. He isn't the type to care about poll ratings, but considering how challenging the job has been and the progress made in key areas — not to mention the pandemic — we in the office think he and his team should get more credit for what's been accomplished. We see the rude comments on social media and other commentaries and wonder what these same folks would do if they had to make the same tough decisions — and bear the responsibility, day after day, of being governor — not just as armchair critics or media pundits.

I also am able to interview the First Lady for her corner of the newsletter — a chance to share her many projects and initiatives to benefit the children of this state. From these and other experiences, I've come away with a tremendous respect for all the work state agencies do — work we often don't see in the headlines, but that is essential to our well-being. Most of all, I want more people to appreciate those elected officials who govern with integrity and substance, not just style or social media hits, because we need ethical, informed decision-makers and an informed electorate to make Hawai'i the best it can be.

Elizabeth "Libby" Young, Editor

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